SEX AND HOMOSEXUALITY: A PASTORAL STATEMENT

by The Rt. Rev. Bennett J. Sims
Bishop of Atlanta

Introduction

Homosexuality has overtaken all other problems in the Church as the most potentially troublesome and least settled issue. There are significant reasons for this.

First, sexuality touches every human being with special intensity and mystery. Personal neutrality about sex is impossible. Sex is an inner engine of clamoring power by design of Another. Therefore it is difficult to be carefully rational in dealing with sexual issues. It seems inevitable that in seeking to state a position on homosexuality, any person, clergy or lay, will argue from deeply conditioned assumptions that carry strong feelings with them. Though I aim in this pastoral statement to be reasonable, faithful and just, I acknowledge at the outset the conditioning of traditional teaching and a heterosexual personal identity.

A second reason for the explosiveness of the homosexual issue is that a prevailing moral consensus to which generations have been accustomed is now under attack. A moral offensive has been mounted against a long-cherished moral position. The consensus shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition has always understood homosexual orientation and homosexual genital acts as perversions of God's intention. Today this view is being aggressively challenged. A growing body of avowed and practicing homosexuals, both within the Church and outside it, are pressing for acceptance of homosexuality as normal and healthy. From within the Church there are those who demand a radical shift from rejection to affirmation of homosexuality as a part of the Creation which God deems good! One Anglican theologian holds that homosexual orientation is an expression of the God-intended variety of his Creation.[1] Most of us are totally unprepared for such a proposed moral reversal and tend to recoil in stupefaction or outrage, or both. Compassion and sober judgment are difficult to muster as we face the leading edges of what may be a mounting controversy.

A third reason for the turbulence over homosexuality is our inexperience in dealing with sex as a religious issue. Christians practice sexuality along with all the rest of humanity; we use and abuse it; we fantasize about it, joke, worry, even pray about it. But we are not practiced, most of us, in gathering the whole range of sexual reality into religious reflection. Additionally, we are not helped in the Church by the confusion of conviction among medical and psychological theorists. Although by resolution and majority vote, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of pathologies, there is no agreement in the secular sciences that homosexuality is, or is not, a correctable abnormality of personality development. Some

1 Norman Pittenger, "A Theological Approach to Understanding Homosexuality" in Barnhouse and Holmes (eds.) *Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality,* (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1976).

clinicians and therapists claim that some homosexual persons may be "constitutional" (born to be so), and perhaps the majority of practicing homosexuals insist that this is so. On the other hand, it is equally evident that, in many cases, homosexuality is an amenable personality dysfunction which, with courage, will, and adequate healing help can be overcome in favor of a decisive heterosexual orientation.

A further reason for our discomfort is the failure of the Church to have come to grips with homosexuality long ago as an occasion of forthright ministry and healing. The effect of this failure has been to abet the forces that have compelled homosexuals into silence, furtiveness, social ostracism and immense burdens of personal guilt from which — until the emergence of Gay Liberation — there seemed no enduring release.

Implied in all these reasons, especially the last, is a plea that, as Christian people, for whom heterosexuality has been and *will remain* the norm, we resist any impulse to be hateful toward a minority in our midst. Such responses tend to betray unresolved malice and dreads in ourselves.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1976 adopted the following resolution.

> ". . . it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church."
>
> (Resolution A-69)

This resolution in no way requires that homosexuality be endorsed as a normal and morally acceptable lifestyle, but it does rule out for Episcopalians all cruel attacks on their identity, politically or personally.

The pastoral statement that follows is a reflection on what others have said and written — on both sides of the argument — and firm deductions based on my own theological loyalties. In any arena of fresh controversy involving Christians of differing views, it is not possible to state *the* Christian position — and certainly never flawlessly, since 'we see through a glass darkly'. But my reading on homosexuality and my counseling with homosexuals have reinforced in me a traditional view, and this, in effect, becomes my personal position as a Bishop. Still, of greater importance than the conviction is the hope which only a firm position makes possible — that there may be mounted a ministry of healing to the homosexual, first to address an anguish of alienation and then to seek replacement of the homosexual condition, be it either ambivalent or fixed, with a decisive heterosexual orientation.

This statement is in three parts: *biblical, theological* and *prac-*

tical. In the biblical portion I seek to understand the chief texts of Scripture that bear upon homosexuality. In the theological section I try to place sexuality itself in the context of Christian doctrine and the promise of new life. In the practical section I try to deal with two critical matters of decision-making that are inescapable for a Bishop of the Episcopal Church: marriage and ordination.

I. Biblical Considerations

There appear to be two extremities about the authority of the Bible on homosexuality. At one extreme, it is enough that the Bible condemns homosexuality, not only in practice, but in terms of a personal condition (it is held). That ends the discussion. At the other extreme, it is irrelevant that the Bible deals judgmentally with homosexuality, since (it is held) the Bible reflects merely the then contemporary social attitudes, or the peculiar inhibitions of some writers — or that the Bible does not address homosexuality explicitly, but only in reference to prevailing behavior in pagan religious circles.

Although Christians have never agreed on the precise meaning of "the authority of Scripture," it is my view that no adequate Christian position on homosexuality can be taken without regard for the Bible as a decisive norm. In the use of Scripture, I seek a middle ground between the extremities described above — drawing upon the carefuly study of the Rev. David A. Scott, professor of theology at the Virginia Theological Seminary.[2] Dr. Scott has done a careful analysis of the relevant biblical texts, citing the challenges of those who would re-interpret Scripture to favor homosexuality. What follows in the biblical section is largely a summary of Dr. Scott's study, with some deductions of my own.

The texts are Genesis 1 and Genesis 2: Genesis 19:1-26; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, in the Old Testament — and in the New Testament, Romans 1:18-32; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10.

Scholars agree that of the two Creation accounts in Genesis, chapter two is the older. In this older account, sexual differentiation is not linked to procreation but rather to the unitive meaning of "one flesh". In the later account, chapter one, sex *is* tied to procreation which, by definition, rules out homosexuality as a divine intention. But proponents of re-evaluation argue that since the earlier and deeper teaching of the Creation tradition does *not* link sex with procreation, there is implied a legitimacy of sexual acts expressing a unitive

[2] David A. Scott, "Homosexuality, Some Theological and Ethical Perspectives", an unpublished paper, 27 pp. 1977.

love between persons even of the *same* sex. (In the theological section I will offer a critique of this proposal that a "unitive love" concept between consenting homosexuals may be grounded in Genesis).

In the story of the destruction of Sodom, Genesis 19:1-26, the condemnation of homosexuality is challenged by re-interpreters on the grounds that inhospitality, not homosexuality, is the point at issue in arousing the divine wrath. The key Hebrew word in the text can be translated so as to convey a non-sexual meaning. The men of Sodom who demanded "to know" (yadha) Lot's male guests were therefore not bent on homosexual assault, but on the interrogation of aliens who had entered the city. The problem with this interpretation is that Lot offers his daughters as substitutes for his male guests, using the same verb (yadha) "to know" — and here the meaning is clearly sexual. Still, it may be argued that it is never explicitly stated that the men of Sodom were homosexual rapists. This traditional interpretation is an inference from Lot's attempt at appeasement by offering his daughters, the men's refusal of the offer, and their subsequent violent treatment of Lot.

The passage is further challenged by re-interpreters on the grounds that all later Old Testament references to the "sin of Sodom" (as in the Prophets) omit explicit reference to homosexuality, and speak instead of the sins of pride, injustice and unrighteousness. Moreover, in the single New Testament reference to the "sin of Sodom" (II Peter 2:6-10) no direct reference is made to homosexuality. In any event, those who seek to re-interpret Genesis 19:1-26 point out that even if it does intend homosexual assault as the cause of God's wrath, this is not the character of homosexual liaison for which homosexuals seek approval today — that is, acts expressing tenderness and commitment between consenting adults.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are traditionally read as unambiguous repudiations of homosexual genital acts. "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman," (18:22 NEB). "If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman, they both commit an abomination," (20:13 NEB). These seem clear as condemning homosexual activity, but two challenges have been advanced. The first holds that these proscriptions make no distinction between "constitutional" (born to be so) homosexuals and predominately heterosexual persons who indulge in deviations from their own norms. It is alleged that, since no such distinction was then known, "constitutional" homosexuals are exempted from the prohibition.

The second challenge is based on the fact that these are single verses embedded in a detailed code of multiple prohibitions primarily concerned with idolatrous religious practices. Obedience to the code of prohibitions, which forbade homosexual acts, was to behave as a faithful Jew — to distinguish a Jew from pagan idolators among whom the Jews lived. Therefore, it can be argued that when homo-

sexuality is not an expression of idolatrous practice in a rival religion, the prohibition against homosexual genital acts loses its force, since homosexual activity no longer signifies apostasy against one's own religion.

Again, as proponents point out, genital acts between homosexuals within a covenant of loyalty and tenderness are not explicitly repudiated in any of the Genesis or Leviticus passages.

However, it must be insisted that these passages do not come to us as isolated dictums, like scattered epics and aphorisms out of a general human history. They are part of the woven tapestry of the Word of God — threads and patterns in a larger picture. They must be seen in their special framework which is the context of the whole Old Testament. In the Old Testament, heterosexual sex is clearly and repeatedly affirmed as God's will for humanity. Homosexual love, however lofty, is never explicitly approved. Indeed, wherever homosexuality is named, it is condemned.

Turning to the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth is not remembered in the Gospels (or anywhere in the New Testament) as having spoken of homosexuality. But the teaching of our Lord is clear with respect to marriage: he affirmed heterosexual marriage to be God's original and enduring will for men and women.

As for the directly relevant passages, they are in the Roman and Corinthian epistles of St. Paul and a later epistle attributed to Paul, I Timothy.

I Timothy 1:10 lists homosexuals along with immoral persons, kidnappers, liars, perjurers — all subject to the condemnation of God's law. This seems clear as a late New Testament judgment against homosexuality. The question remains open however, whether the passage refers to persons with a homosexual orientation, or only to homosexuals who engage in genital acts. This raises a distinction between the categories of "being" and "doing" — which are better dealt with in connection with the Corinthian and Roman passages, and in the theological section as well.

I Corinthians 6:9 carries a list of vices similar to those listed in I Timothy, all of them condemned, including homosexuality. However, in this passage of St. Paul (as the authentic writer) strikes a critical note not included in I Timothy. In verse 11 he makes the point that "such were some of you". His meaning is that by God's grace certain persons known to him had been freed from these sins, including homosexuality. Still, the question remains open as to the meaning of being freed: was it freedom from the old identity (being) in favor of a new one as a heterosexual, or was it freedom from the compulsion to engage in homosexual acts (doing), while retaining the old identity? We do not know, and Christian teaching must make a judgment as to the Pauline meaning that "excludes homosexuals from the

Kingdom of God". Most Christian communions would understand St. Paul to intend a distinction between being and doing — that it was perverse *behavior* he condemned, not sinful identity — since, as he writes in another passage relevant to the homosexual issue: "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who *do* such things." (Romans 2:3, *underline* my own).

This brings the analysis to Romans and to that passage traditionally regarded as the sternest repudiation of homosexuality in the New Testament. Speaking of the perversity of those who turn against the loving lure of God, Paul writes, "God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchange natural relations for unnatural, the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own person the due penalty for their error." (Romans 1:26-27 RSV).

Two kinds of challenge have been advanced against the traditional understanding of this passage. First, it is pointed out that the theme of this whole section in Romans is not homosexuality as such, but the wrath of God upon a disobedient humanity — homosexuality being but a consequence of a generalized human bondage to "original sin". The real point at issue therefore, it is argued, is not homosexuality at all, but rather the human perversity of dishonor to God and its consequences. The effect of this argument is to suggest that there exists a wholly other motivation for homosexual activity than perverse dishonor to God — thus when homosexuality is set in the motivating context of love for God and one another, the activity escapes altogether the condemnation intended by this passage. This seems an argument from silence that defeats itself morally. In context, the condemnation of homosexual activity is bound to apply equally to all other forms of behavior which St. Paul condemns. The logical effect of the exemption argument is to suggest that, given the proper motivation, there are loving ways to be "full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity . . ." (Romans 1:29 ff. RSV). This is moral absurdity.

A second kind of challenge advances the view that St. Paul is simply cataloging sinful manifestations against nature — and that "constitutional" homosexuality is therefore exempted, since it is an expression of what is natural for those so "constituted". Agreement with this argument requires an admission that there is a category of divine intention into which some men and women are born as "constitutional" homosexuals. This is unsubstantiated. Agreement with the argument also means that St. Paul implied a distinction between a morality of inversion ("constitutional") and a morality of perversion. And this is not open to substantiation, since we cannot talk to St. Paul.

Again, as in the case of the Old Testament, the New Testament references need to be viewed as part of a whole fabric. The teaching

of Jesus about marriage, the teaching of St. Paul and other writers of the New Testament are unanimous and undeviating in portraying heterosexual love as God's will — and therefore good and normative. Against this background, and considering the arguments advanced that dispute a traditional biblical understanding of homosexuality, I cannot escape the conclusion that homosexual behavior is explicitly and implicitly regarded as deviate and sinful — especially in what has long been viewed as the linchpin passage, Romans 1:26 ff.

But implied in this conclusion is a distinction which I feel must be made between homosexual identity and homosexual activity. While it is abundantly clear from Scripture that both heterosexual being and doing are unanimously affirmed, and that homosexual doing is condemned, it is not clear from Scripture just what morality attaches to homosexual being. What are we to say about the morality of an unsought homosexual orientation? This calls upon theology.

II. Theological Considerations

Once again, for Christians, the biblical evidence is a decisive norm. But for most of us it is not exhaustive, even for the biblically conservative. That is why the Christian tradition has always included *interpretation* in the forms of teaching and preaching — which in their most traditional approaches are simply the continual opening of the darkness and mystery of human life to the illumining lift of the Word of God. This is theology.

A trinitarian theological approach can illume the darkness and mystery of human sexuality. First, it is affirmed that humanity is made in the image of God (Creation). Second, humanity is in bondage to sin which distorts that image in so deep and "original" a way that only the gracious action of God through his Son can break the bondage (Redemption). Third, we live now in the age of the Spirit, sent by God to be his empowerment for our growth in outreaching love, maturity and holiness (Sanctification).

A. Creation

In regard to the image of God, it is crucial to any Christian understanding of sex that the divine image in humanity is incomplete without both man and woman — which is to hold that the aim of Christian sexuality is not personal satisfaction but interpersonal *completeness.* "The two shall become one flesh", (see Genesis 2:24 and Mark 10:8). This is the ancient prescription. One plus one equals one: completeness. It remains a great mystery since human experience is imperfect, even in rapture. But from the mystery we can discern the meaning of the ideal of completeness, which is *the union of opposites* — or the coming together of differences. This does not mean simply genital differences (though this is fundamental to a biblical understanding of sexuality), but differences of personality, temperament, social function, aspiration, etc. — all gathered into the physical symbol of genital differentiation.

This understanding rejects homosexuality as a distortion of divine intent.

> "It is not a valid model of sexuality, for it affirms incompleteness . . . It is probably true that any love is better than no love in a loveless world. But love is not a single, lone act isolated from other acts. It is part of a whole, the ordering of relation . . . Fulfillment must be found outside the self if it is to affect the self. But in sexual matters fulfillment is completeness, the coming together of differences."[3]

Instantly, this explains the fearful psychodynamics of heterosexuality — how and why sex is, at one and the same time, a bewitching lure and the very rocks and shoals on which relationships run aground. We long for completeness, but the *coming together of opposites is enormously difficult work.*

It also explains why Christian marriage is always a life-long contract. Only a commitment of that duration and moral force suffices to provide most men and women the time and security to discover and grow in the unselfishness required to bring opposites together.

The ominous rise in divorce rates, the proliferating pornography, the increasing hedonism and preoccupation with sex for its own sake — all these are symptoms of the moral failure of our culture to rise to the inherent challenge of divinely created sexuality: that it is *sacramental.* Sex is a symbol of personal commitment to give and receive at the deepest levels of interpersonal sharing and fidelity. And it is not humanity's gift to itself; it is God's bestowal and it carries conditions.

Which, therefore, is worse from the standpoint of the Giver: heterosexual lasciviousness and promiscuity, or the deviate nature of homosexuality which so readily gives rise to liaisons of convenience and short-term commitments? Who can know? But two conclusions seem clear.

First, widespread scorn among heterosexuals for the sacramental ideal of sex (and its imperfect fulfillment in even the best marriages) is decidedly *not* a justification for endorsing homosexuality, even where its proponents profess an ideal of fidelity in a homosexual relationship. The use of one failure to cast more favorable light upon another failure is the first circle in a spiral of collapsing morality.

Second, in reference to the biblical standard of sexuality and sexual behavior, St. Paul's conclusion about the basic human condition applies with fresh force in our time: "For there is no distinction; since

[3] John W. Dixon, Jr., "The Sacramentality of Sex" in Barnhouse and Holmes (eds.) op. cit.

all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:22b and 23 RSV). Sin is the innate perversity of the human spirit (which we who write of sex must acknowledge as we write), that rebels against the sovereign will of God. All relationships up and down the scale of normal-abnormal are soiled, to the degree of our rebellion, by this sinister power of alienation: original sin.

B. Redemption

Repentance is the moral and spiritual mechanism by which we lay hold of the healing, re-integrating work of God in Jesus Christ — his work of restoring to human identity its image of intended godliness.

In regard to homosexuality, the most important witness of Scripture is not condemnation, but the promise of liberation. St. Paul is explicit about the contrast effected by the love of God in Christ between an old life in bondage to sin and a new life of freedom. And Christian freedom is never license to live as before (Gal. 5:13). It is the gift of power to have done with alienating, guilt-inducing behaviour. This is the freedom of inner harmony and healing — accomplished again and again as persons are open in penitence and resolve.

Repentance means the decision to be personally responsible for choices. It is the refusal to drift, the refusal to delay. And this refusal rests on a critical prior decision which is the *refusal to pass the buck.* This is the pre-condition to repentance: the refusal of all self-pity and self-justification by which human ingenuity concocts blameworthy figures (of whom there is always an abundant supply) such as Eve and the serpent — and even God himself as a last resort, whom Adam cleverly blamed as the inventor of "that woman whom thou gavest to be with me," (Genesis 3:12 RSV). The vicious consequence of this refusal of responsibility is the abdication of human freedom.

One wonders how much the insistence upon a "constitutional" homosexuality is not at bottom a contemporary expression of blaming God as a last resort — the shift of responsibility for one's being — and the parallel abdication of freedom. This is a very difficult question and needs to be dealt with compassionately even when conviction compels us to challenge the idea of "constitutional" homosexuality. The moral problem that attaches to the idea of homosexuality as *fixed in one's being* is that it tends to the loss of moral freedom. There are at least two arguments that must be met in challenging the moral appropriateness of this "constitutional" idea.

First, it is claimed that homosexuality is genetic. Therefore, personal responsibility for the condition would be as inappropriate as an apology for blue eyes or old age. However, geneticists point out that any gene clustering in the embryo that does not or cannot lead to reproduction and therefore to the perpetuation of a species gene pool is by definition, "maladaptive". That is to say, such a clustering is counterproductive of the fundamental purpose of genetic behavior. In these terms homosexuality, if it be genetic in origin, cannot be reproductive of the race and therefore represents in its very condition a deviation from genetic norms. It is a violation of genetic purpose. Whether one can be morally responsible for the arrangement of his or her genes is doubtful — and here is reason enough for an attitude of compassion to replace public contempt.

But again, compassion does not mean endorsement! At the deep genetic level, homosexuality appears to be what it has always been in the valuation of Scripture: a deviation from the norm of God's will in creating us male and female. And each person, having to function within the limits of a life no one chooses — each of us with impairments of some kind — is responsible before God for what he or she does with the gift of life *in reference to God's revealed will.*

Second, it is claimed that homosexuality originates at pre-conscious levels of personality formation — so early in life as to be immovably fixed as part of one's being. This argument moves up the scale from the physiological to the psychological level. It is decidedly true that most strong homosexual orientation has a history of damaging parental and interpersonal influences that operate early and powerfully on the emotional development of a child at the unconscious level. Homosexuality does appear to be an unconscious adaptive step taken by a threatened personality for its self-protection. But here, at this level, it is far less doubtful than at the genetic level that one can be absolved of moral responsibility. A careful Freudian scholar, Robert Stoller, makes the point that:

> "Freud believed perversion is motivated, i.e, that a person is somehow in his depths, in part responsible for his perversion. The deviant act, Freud felt, is the product of the great human capacity for choice and so ultimately has a moral quality (even if one's responsibility is mitigated because the choice is unconscious and was arrived at because of unsought threatening circumstances in childhood)."[4]

A Christian psychotherapist, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, comments that if this were not true, then psychotherapy could never work. This is so because we cannot change what is beyond our control!

[4] Robert Stoller, quoted in Barnhouse, "Homosexuality", Anglican Theological Review, Supplementary Series #6, June 1976.

> "The process of psychotherapy entails a very large element of helping the sufferer to understand that he is not a victim of something beyond himself, but that choices made in the past, however unconsciously, can be reviewed and *new decisions taken.*"[5]

Therapy which does not rest upon such an assumption must necessarily rest upon some other which would be empty of moral content unless it held a person responsible for choices. Without moral content therapy is simply manipulative. It cannot respect the critical ingredient of moral freedom as expressing every human being's unique individuality. The important thing to notice here is that an amoral psychotherapy that seeks to absolve the sufferer from moral responsibility is not only anti-Christian — it is actually heretical to orthodox Freudian assumptions. Christian theology and Freudian psychoanalytic theory agree here.

What this argument leads to is that, unless the Church is ready to challenge homosexual claims about the normalness of homosexuality, then the Church in effect joins in reducing and degrading the humanity of the very people to whom the Church needs to minister — in regard for them as fellow-sufferers, fellow-sinners and children of God.

It would be untrue to them and to the Gospel of Christ to speak of compassion without cost — as if the mercy of God, which all of us claim as believers, were available apart from the conscious assumption of moral responsibility. There is no such thing as cheap grace; no such gift as a redeemed and liberated life without entrance upon the crucifixion of the "old man". God's love is not a pat on the head, but a refiner's fire — because he honors us in the freedom he bestows upon us as *responsible,* from the beginning of our growing up to the end of our final chance in this life. This means that every failure along the way to take a step of growing up involves us in moral default. Putting it positively, every assumption of responsibility for the choices we make is a claim upon personal maturity and freedom. This is a moral victory.

Repentance is a rich old word. Repentance is the way back to the recovery of lost chances. Repentance is the way forward to maturity and virtue. Repentance claims the healing power of the universe — which is implicit in every instance of inner healing, whatever the auspices — and is explicit in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Redeemer of a sinful humanity.

[5] Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, "Homosexuality", ibid, p. 127 (underline my own).

C. Sanctification

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law . . ." (Galatians 5:22-23 RSV). We know that in history and in the present moment, Christian persons of homosexual orientation manifest the fruit of the Spirit — even while they struggle, as all human beings must, against the works of the flesh: "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, . . . enmity, strife, jealousy, anger . . . " (Galatians 5:19-20, RSV). And we know that Christian persons of homosexual orientation have regarded their condition with sorrow and contrition, but unable to change, have drawn on the Spirit for the power of forbearance and chastity — which is sanctification indeed.

I have in mind here, especially, clergy of the Church who, in commitment to Christ, have offered an enduring inner blemish for God's use, that divine power may be perfected in human weakness. St. Paul is the author of this valuation of infirmities from which we are not to be delivered, but which, by their offering, become the very material out of which God fashions strength of character and sanctity of life. (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

The personal goal of the Christian life goes by a fine old name: *sainthood.* Sainthood always represents the victory of the Holy Spirit who conquers, where he is given decisive reign, the compulsion of our gross appetites. "I mean this:" writes Paul, "if you are guided by the Spirit you will not fulfill the desires of your lower nature." (Galatians 5:16 NEB). Implicit here is the answer to the question on which Scripture is explicitly silent: that is, whether homosexual identity (being) is condemned. From the evidence, the answer must be no, it is *not.* The whole weight of Jesus' own ministry makes a distinction between sin and the sinner, insisting on God's love for the wayward, patiently seeking the wayward's redemption. In the case of homosexuality, the stubbornness of its grip may be utterly unconquerable as a fixed and primary sexual orientation, *but personal character may be so lifted* (sainted) by the Spirit's power as to free the homosexual from the need for homosexual activity.

Sexuality and sexual behavior are dimensions of humanness, but they do not constitute a person as a human being. They cannot, in actual fact, because there are persons who for reasons of physical impairment, or psychic makeup, or commitment to celibacy, never engage in genital sex with a partner. Such persons do not lose their humanness. Indeed, humanness can be heightened in terms of sensitivity and selflessness — which are the spiritual goals of the gift of sex as we Christians understand the gift.

The pastoral question is how to be just, as we face openly the homosexual issue? How to hew to the norms of a good and God-intended sexuality while reaching out in compassion for those in the

thrall of a distortion? I suggest *two* modes of ministry.

First, that we take seriously the promise of the Spirit's work at the corporate level — which is communion with one another. All the works of the Spirit are instrumental to unity: love, joy, peace . . . Somehow the church cannot be in the Spirit and in calculated strife at one and the same time. Let heterosexual Christians rely on the Spirit to put away censoriousness and dread. Let homosexual Christians rely on the Spirit to put away rage and any need to proselytize.

The time is surely gone when, in the name of Christ, anyone may justly persecute a homosexual — or mount a political effort that deliberately seeks a public policy of discrimination. A trust that homosexuals have no need to persuade the impressionable into homosexual experimenting would dissipate the fears that give rise to persecution.

Second, out of the conviction that God wills healing, let us hold to the norm of heterosexuality and trust the Spirit's power to make flourish anew the Church's healing gifts. Let us dare the possibility that God himself has willed that we be compelled in our time to look squarely into the homosexual's ancient sufferings — and so be forced to find in his Spirit the power of healing which he may withhold until we seek it.

What this means is that the place of the homosexual in the Church is not acceptance as representing a third order of legitimate sexuality (which adds something to the created orders of male and female) — but acceptance as one in process of growth and change. All of us are human "becomings", our beings intended by God to respond to the summons of maturity as we bear the cruciformity of life and find it the way toward "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13 RSV). For the homosexual in process this may mean the development through healing into a new identity as a heterosexual — or development through healing into a new sanctity that accepts a thorn in the flesh as a means of grace.

III. Practical Considerations

Always the practice of the Church must go forward in the absence of perfection. Decisions must be made in the foreknowledge of their flaws, since nothing we do is unmarred by the partiality of our wisdom. But two primary decisions must be made now and in the days ahead with respect to homosexuality.

A. Marriage

The aim of sexuality as understood in Christian terms is not satisfaction, but completeness. The argument for this, advanced in the theological section, rules out the Church's altering its tradition with regard to marriage. The Church is right to confine its blessing exclusively to heterosexual marriage. Completeness of sexuality is the bringing together of radical differences, male and female. "The two shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24). By this standard, homosexual liaison witnesses to *incompleteness.* For the Church to institutionalize by liturgical action a relationship that violates its own theological assumptions about sex is inadmissable.

This does not suggest that homosexuals are incapable of sincerity and loftiness of commitment. That is a matter of individual choice and conscience, for which individuals must make answer. But the Church's liturgical action is not individual. It is corporate. It is also public. It witnesses to what the Church stands for — and to what it advocates as good for society as a whole.

B. Ordination

Here it is crucial to distinguish between (1) the "avowed and practicing" homosexual and (2) one with a dominant homosexual orientation about which he or she is willing to do one of two things: either submit the condition to a ministry of healing, or, finding after prolonged attempts at healing that the condition is incurable, is ready to sublimate that sexual impulse in a commitment to celibacy and continence.

1. In the case of the first, the "avowed and practicing" homosexual, ordination is inadmissable — on two grounds.

First, as in Christian marriage, ordination is a corporate and proclamational act. By means of its ordination liturgy, the Church proclaims its values — not simply for itself, but in evangelistic terms for the social order. The ordination of an avowed and practicing homosexual, in my judgment, involves the Church in a public denial of its own theological and moral norms on sexuality.

Second, one of the vows required of an ordinand commits him or her to the fashioning of personal (and family or community) life after the manner of Christ so as to be a wholesome example to the Church. The ordination of an avowed and practicing homosexual would require the Church's sanction of such a lifestyle, not only as acceptable, but *worthy of emulation.* On the basis of the foregoing biblical and theological considerations this is inadmissable.

2. In the case of the second, the non-practicing homosexual who seeks healing, it is my judgment that the door to ordination must be kept *open.* To close it on categorical grounds would be to deny all that we profess about the promises of liberation and healing. It would

also deny what we have experienced of personal growth and change in heterosexual persons who present themselves for selection, candidacy, and training for ordination. Final judgment as to personal suitability for ordination is reserved to the Bishop, with the advice and consent of canonically stipulated boards of review. In the case of a homosexual seeking healing, the judgment as to fitness needs to be made on an individual basis in the course of a searching, challenging and supportive process — which is the prevailing policy by canon law in all dioceses of the Episcopal Church with respect to all who seek ordination.

Conclusion

We are at a critical moment in the American pilgrimage. The wind of a well-intended permissiveness which sought the release of human creativity has blown us a whirlwind. It would be easy to hoist a white flag of despair. On its underside, permissiveness has spawned a moral anarchy that is nowhere more lurid than in our self-serving sexuality. But it is simply not in the created nature of the human spirit to be fulfilled by wantonness. As a counterthrust to the forces that would send society down to an unruly demise, many of us sense abroad and in ourselves a new hunger and thirst after righteousness — a longing for dependable order to ennoble human ardor. God grant us as a Church to stand tall for what we have received and believe, that the world may know on whom to count for what endures to sustain and nourish human souls.

But let us resolve never to seek for others what we are unready to seek for ourselves: lives given over to Christ daily, allowing him to use whatever infirmity there be in us to work his will in making all things new.

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Communications Department
Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta
2744 Peachtree Road, N.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30305